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ABSTRACT

Following the work of Vygotsky, this paper explores three dimensions of change in play therapy: linear, additive, and emergent pivotal structures. In therapeutic play, the child expresses actions and initiates movements, sounds, and gestures. Then, seemingly "out of the blue," the child shifts such gestures to an episode containing unrelated behaviors. This shift of activity is called a "pivot." More precisely, a pivot is a shift in action within an action, a turning point in a flow of events. In therapy, the stopping, starting, continuation, and modification of play sketch out the domain of the pivot and the foundations for change in therapy. Whether linear, additive, or emergent, the number of pivots in a session is not relevant; however, the purpose each plays and the structure and function each portends are significant. In play therapy, the pivot belongs to the child and is stimulated as a representation of the child's need for meaning. (RH)

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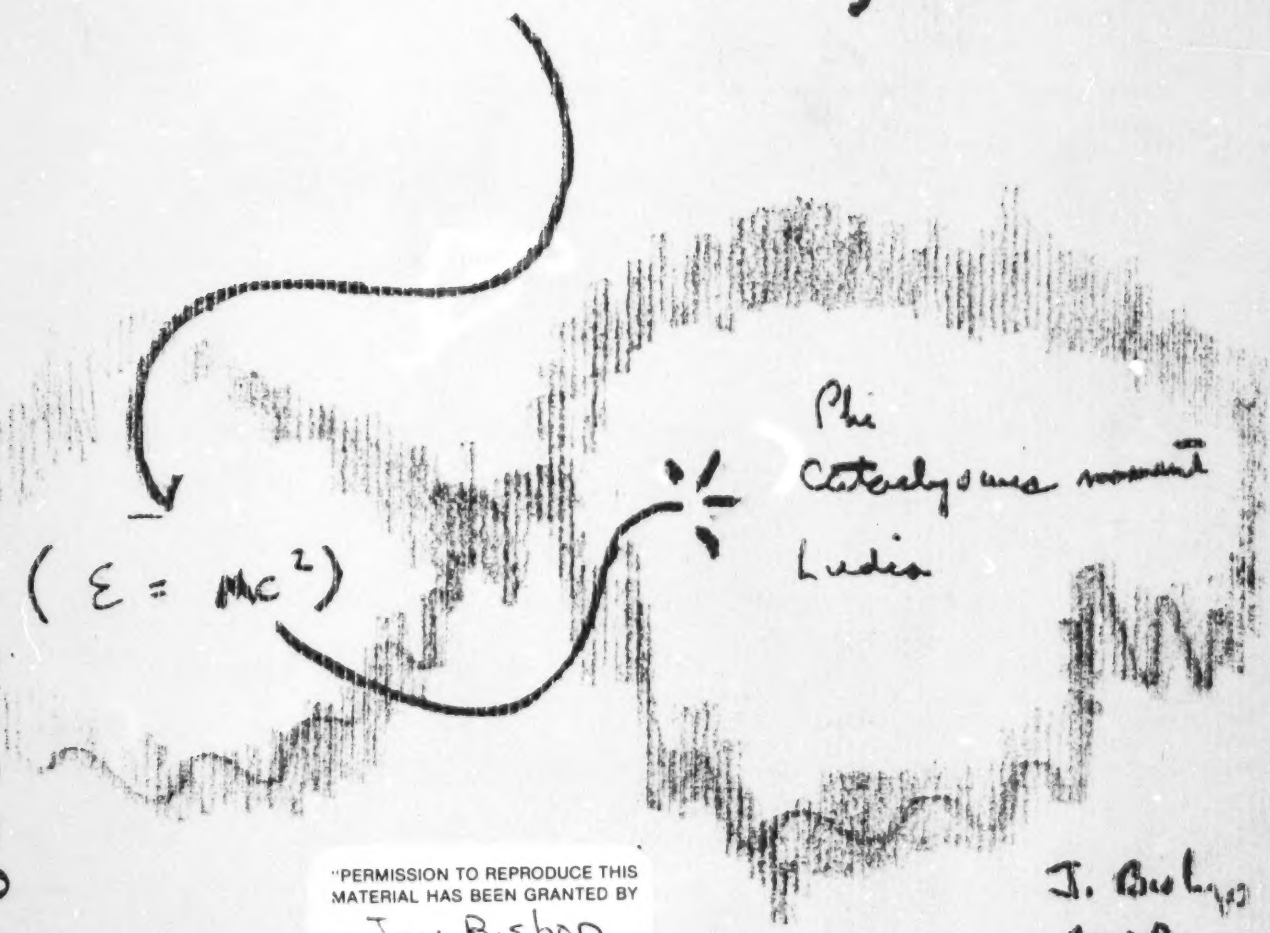

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Abstract

Following the work of Vygotsky this paper explores three dimensions of change in play therapy. Actual case material is used examine the role of pivots as dimensions of change in the change process. It is argued that the pivoting function may serve as a universe for change which allows us to focus more intently on therapeutic events. Doing so gives us questions to address rather than answers to confound.

Resume

S'appuyant sur les travaux de Vygotsky, cette etude explore trois dimensions du changement dans la therapie par le jeu. Un cas authentique a ete utilise pour examiner le role des pivots comme dimensions du changement dans le processus du changement. On cherche a montrer que la fonction du pivot pourrait etre utilisee universellement pour un changement nous permettant de mettre davantage en lumiere les evenements therapeutiques. Ceci nous amene a'poser des questions plutot qu'a fournir des reponses qui apporteraient davantage de confusion.

Change as a Function of Play: Toot! Toot!

"His visage changed as from a mask to a face." C. Bronte.

In the discipline of counselling, the process of giving answers rather than that of asking of questions has received more attention than desirable. This paper addresses questions and offers, for scrutiny, a framework for studying them. Children and their families continue to suffer the tortures of themselves and their circumstance. They are pain-w. acked and alone their isolation and protest eating from within, their immature and misdeveloped skills insufficient for coping with the angry and misunderstood pasts and futures of their lives. They need assistance from helping sources which are carefully scrutinized, understood, and, from a process of art and science, loved. To love something changeable and changing makes the process human and alive (see Bronowsky, 1965). Regretfully play therapy lives to improve the state of more answers than questions. Play therapy is alive not as an answer but as a question.

Science and Play Therapy

To search for questions has not been a tradition of play therapy. Our therapies as well as our applied sciences have been projective in thematizing answers to inordinantly complex problems (see Miller 1969). With our perspectives and our methods we invent the reality we study. In the application of science to reason we stand a long way from being empathic in the ways we build buildings, plan governments, teach and rear children, and help those in need. Our modern science thematizes answers rather than extending or developing questions. The procedures of behavior modification, programmed learning, and perspective teaching stand as cases in point. Science is both principled and procedural (Bronowsky 1956). Science belongs to no one nation or space and time frame. When science gets too close in policies and procedures to these dimensions of nation, space and time it becomes a kit bag of routines, disguises, and false confirmations and tests (Koester & Popper 1981, Kuhn 1970, Polanyi 1946). Science should flow under its own power which is the flow power of search. When science varies from a true search theme it becomes corrupted.

In many ways the study of play therapy has become corrupted because of its failure to address, the search of science as its god. In play therapy our gods are people who pontificate answers to very complex questions. Search processes are incorruptible. Keeping the principles of quest, truth, and beauty in the forefront of science the process becomes free to provoke, and, in its spirit, challenge dialectically the relations between romance and precision (see Whitehead 1929).

This paper seeks to challenge the relationships between romance and precision in searching for examinations, the mechanisms of change extending from the playful therapeutic processes in work with children. Why, must these mechanisms of change in therapy elude our grasp like the fire we try to freeze? In consequence, we wax eloquently, prescribing, procedures, telling, classifying, identifying, even helping but we do not search or ask. We of the helping world do not as we tell--and our telling "tells." Our science has been ugly in its preoccupation with the properties of number and relation and so naive in its treatment of principle, in quest of theory and method. Hence, to ask the scientist to address a principle eschews dialectically the processes of science and art he tries to separate (Henle 1975). Changes in play therapy must be examined.

The context

To challenge this romance with precision in the search for clearer, more testable, mechanisms of change requires me to miniaturize the material or reality to be examined (see Bachelard 1964). To miniaturize is not reductive (see Jessor 1958). Reversing the magnified image on a telescope miniaturizes the message cast. The image is smaller, yet richer in color and more precise in definition. In the case of a story told in miniature such as Petit Poucet (Tom Thumb), we seem to have no difficulty in finding the principle of the primal image: "Where tininess paves the way for everything that happens" (Bachelard, p. 164). Hence the phenomenological situation of this miniaturization process is precarious and subject to the dialectics of wonder and jest. We leave ourselves selfishly vulnerable examining the very events we may be forming. We find ourselves confirmining the consequences we initiated and inventing the reality that we try to study. The processes of change form the bench marks for further search in our quest for that

which in the process is and is not. The grace of this miniature glance expands our vision a thousandfold.

In miniaturizing I wish to focus upon the events extending through play therapy sessions composed of a series of episodic events where therapist and child function separately and together, creating a poetry of play-like actions producing meaning extending beyond the worlds of both counsellor and child (Bishop 1978). These actions seem to be thematic and natural wherein the child promotes activities composed of thoughts and actions making statements about the child and his concerns, where through his play the child says what he feels. The theoretical formulations behind this analysis will take form as the paper proceeds. Therapeutic change becomes a mind/body process exalting function for better, more responsive and responsible living. The process bristles with complexity and passion. In play therapy both participants are active and engaged. As she plays, the counsellor both follows and supports the play of the child. In the flow of action the child represents the pain and misunderstanding he feels. The form of these provides the medium for change. The counsellor's responsibility lies with the medium, whereas the child's lies with himself and the medium. To the counsellor the child's play is medium to the child. To the child in therapy change is the medium and his actions extend this medium in ways unending.

Picture a child playing on a sandpile arranging cars, trucks and busses, making bridges and roads, transporting sand from hill to hill. In the theme the truck hits a car killing the baby inside. "I want to kill the baby," the child says which the counsellor repeats. The waywardness of the truck in contrast to the orderedness of the sandpile and the phenomenally nascient availability of the car and its baby carry messages fraught with meaning, aside from the feelings of creation and loss. Miniaturizing the messages cast within the theme the child allows us to look more closely at the process of change emanating from them. Perhaps the child is screaming with anger, saying to himself, my baby needs to be killed so I can grow beyond. What was the child doing with the car just before it hit the baby? What roles did the child now take after the accident? These are importantly complex questions. Miniaturizing the gaze allows us to ask questions of

questions. A child at play separates himself, by his actions, in theme, form and structure. The activities stand by themselves unique and sacred unto the process. Play like science and art, is a process. As such it serves unto itself as a process of itself for itself. Play does not produce a product. Forces promoting the process originate from within the player. These forces are not borrowed or shared. They emerge from within the activity as the child begins playing. In play a reality particular to the process is created. Rocks become crocodiles and puddles rivers as the child pretends and plays out a river boat rescue. To play is to spontaneously shift in process, creating a special play reality, stimulating itself and serving itself. If a product is produced it becomes incidental to the action expressed. With this definition of play the role the product plays in therapy becomes complex indeed. Health is a product and actions producing it become the questions leading to the many answers already given. With only answers the therapist with his methods creates the illness he tries to treat.

The place of play in play therapy is delicate indeed. The counsellor has layed out the materials and has grouped them thematically before the child arrives. The paints are put out, the sand smoothed and the hand puppets displayed. Once into a play theme the counsellor might repeat the engine sounds or the lion's roar complementing the child's actions. The counsellor's voiced movements are more subtle, quieter and supportive to the action underway. In miniature the actions between counsellor and child are coordinated. In the fray the child expresses actions, initiates movements, sounds and gestures then, seemingly out of the blue, shifts his gestures to an episode of unrelated behaviors of another kind. Where actions flow, stop, and shift the child goes on playing. This shift of activity is called a pivot (Vygotsky 1962, Bishop 1983). A pivot is a shift in action within an action, a turning point in a flow or events. In therapy this stop, start, continuation and modification of play sketch out the domain of the pivot and the foundations for change in therapy. The course of change can be observed in miniature and monitored through the study of the pivots in the play therapy process. Pivots earmark the changes undertaken. To study these, as questions allows us closer peeks at the process of change and the mechanisms producing them. To free play in a

non-structured setting is to pivot at will. To do play therapy is to monitor the pivots and the will. The pivot of play therapy seems particular to the process. Pivots herald change, they possess special powers.

In a paper presented some 12 years ago I formulated the hierarchization of the child's play in therapy (Bishop 1968). Over time the child reaches higher and higher levels of play through changes in play themes as the therapy continues. That paper lacked a wisdom identified in a 1978 paper which introduced themes of romance and beauty in the play process. Where change was a function of singing, art, drama and dance performed by the counsellor and child in concert, "composing" their way to becoming better artists. Here the therapist was helping the child become more precise in his expression of ideas and feelings through the art, creativity and play therapy of the process. A 1983 paper introduced the concepts of flow and pivot as dimensions of process in the changes in reality, as seen by a marginally psychotic boy. In flow the zone of proximal development comes alive when the child acts beyond himself selecting themes for his play. Propitiously apt are these for working through the issues the child feels to be important. The time points at which change occurs stems from the pivots experienced and the feelings extended in the relationship that is shared. According to Schwartzman (1978) play is the process of making the familiar strange and the unknown known.

Below please find a model for change in play therapy for examining more minutely the processes of change in the pivots and flow of a process that is probably more mutual than hierarchical, more functional than structural, more open than fixed or closed. This paper examines the nature of change in direction, extent and form as a function of the pivotal action displayed as the process unfolds. Where change is a function of the feelings shared and the pivots expressed. Here is my tentative formula for change in play therapy:

$$C = F\,(p)\,(A/M)$$

Change = Function (pivots) Actions/Meaning

According to this formula change in therapy is a function of the pivot times the relationship between the actions expressed as determined by the meanings intended. As far as we can tell the processes of inner thought or consciousness leads and follows the flow of actions expressed. We assume that the child thinks and feels the themes he plays out. In flow, change in therapy is a function of the relations of relations of the content of the flow where the shifts in relations determine and are determined by the ideas creating the meaning. This is a model of meaning and its changes as function of actions which become playful. Play that is not play therapy is a function of the relations between particular actions and meaning, it is cosmic, spiritual, and inherently self-determining. The play in therapy moves differently not because of the actions or the dimensions of meaning implied but through the pivotal structures determining the functions of play. The paper will now describe three possible structures: the linear, the additive and the emergent.

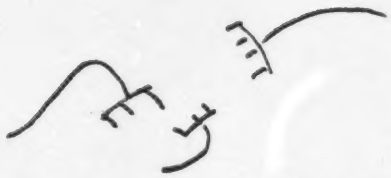
Shift I Linear

Picture Sam an eight-year-old child, rigid, self-possessed, totally ritualized in his play. We find him deeply engrossed in a sandbox and car/truck sequence. A roadway emerges as the truck moves and the car makes its own road as the child incorporates a Dukes of Hazzard plot onto the proceedings. One underway the road becomes more elaborate, where the child puts down the truck, lifts, and places a plastic tree then pats down more sand, modifies the contour of a curve, goes back to the truck, loads it then, with engine roaring, grabs another plastic tree which he plants, still holding onto the truck which moves across the sand over to a corner to rebuild a levy that he just kicked over. This child is doing two or more things at the same time. Combining intentions, actions and consequences in the same actions. This is seen as a sequence of linear shifts. The movement of the truck leads to his attention to the road linking them to Sam's sighting of the tree and its placement. For a better perspective he moved his feet resulting in the kick to the levy and the actions to repair it. These junctures of feeling, sight, thought and action were shifts, shifts in the linear flow of the actions expressed. This linear pivot can be expressed in the following ways.

In the big picture this change has been small and relatively insignificant, however, further pivoting is inevitable. Doing in multiples must be combined with other doings of a social and intellectual kind. Counsellors would be wise to be observing of such actions to aid and abet the meaning intended and facilitate the quality of the child's living in all that he does.

Shift II Additive

In the second example of change we find, in the playroom, Barney, age 11 years, abandoned two years previously by a very abusive parent. Both he and the counsellor are on an upper shelf over the sandbox with a family of hand puppets playing out a wedding theme. In play voice, Barney repeats the sacred vows of marriage . . . "Do you promise to love and obey and never hurt each other . . . never! never! never!" he repeats solemnly. He and the therapist then march slowly down the aisle, Barney hums out the wedding march and repeats part of the ceremony. At the moment of the marriage proclamation where the two hand puppets kiss Barney maintains the embrace. At the same moment he grabs the microphone of a nearby tape recorder and begins announcing in radio announcer fashion . . . "I'm Barney R. in the playroom with Linda P., we're on top of the sandbox playing "marriage," and talking and talking. The play time will be over in ten minutes and people are watching us from the other side of the glass." Here we have a pivot that is more additive than linear. At the moment of shift Barney added incidentally, circumstances of the setting, as well as played out events of the marriage. Deeply in play, reconstructing his family and fabricating a union extending the vows of never hurting each other, never, never, never, Barney changes. Rebuilding his family dismembered by the horrors of an unknown and misunderstood past and present. He pivots to add demographic details of his situation and, with the counsellor, to link in play bonding and marriage experiences. He destroys the composure of the love moment, like the lover at the point of climax checking his watch to see what time it is. The play is broken off and the intimacy destroyed. This additive pivot can be represented figuratively in the following ways:



This additive play shift diverges the direction of feeling and thinking to include references of another time and place. Previously Barney was a very anxious boy, self-centered and immature, who played abusively with younger children. Here Barney was shifted in and out of play, in an out of some kind of positively integrative state remaking the genesis of his own existence and that of his family. These additive shifts are both constructive and destructive. In therapy they help the counsellor apply circumstantial references from play themes to the child's life outside. These are particularly richer pivots than those of linear action. Rich because they identify for him the powerful feelings surrounding the shift. Barney's pivot moved him both further and closer to the memories of a misunderstood past.

Shift III Emergent

The first pivot converged in its linearity while the second became divergent as it expanded. The third pivot will neither converge nor diverge, it will emerge discontinuously in the flow of the play. This was discussed in the earlier work (Bishop 1983). Here a theory was presented laying out the conditions necessary and sufficient for change. Using the notions of Vygotsky (1962) on the pivot and the zone of proximal development, the concept of flow as advanced by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) and Paul Klee's notion of dynamic repose (Rothenberg 1979) I showed how the child, in flow, enhances his zone of proximal development and, at the moment of dynamic repose, the pivot takes on special powers. Where the child is both therapist and child born anew, both in and out of play, and in and out of the therapy. These notions are important here to extend and expand the essence of this emerging pivot.

Picture Alvin, seven years of age, marginally psychotic, constantly insulating himself from the world outside. In previous sessions his play has been impulsive and compulsive; he does not speak with clarity, nor can he write his own name. Earlier he had been playing out over and over the play themes of "Smash-up Derby" and "The Dukes of Hazzard." In this session he plays out the transformation scene in the Great Hulk TV program. It is uncanny that he chooses the Great Hulk drama for simulating in play therapy. Chances are that the stewardship of his zone of proximal development

obliged Alvin to select intuitively for enacting, this change sequence. It is propitious for the child to use the "Great Hulk" drama because, not like Superman whose change is phone booth hidden, or Spiderman who switches from Spidey to Peety in lightswitch fashion, the change of the Great Hulk is extended. This story is the essence of the program. Alvin intuitively creates the theme, emphasizing the facial and body gestures, the grunts and groans of the transformational spectre. Then, in the middle of the metamophotic change, Alvin falls, falls, falls, and before he reaches the ground from the corner of his eye he looks up and winks at the counsellor. Perceptively quick, the counsellor catches this and winks back. Instantaneously, Alvin returns to the transformation, groaning a few more times and emerges as the all powerful giant. The pivot has done many things, it interrupts the change sequence, it redefines the process giving meaning to both the subjectivity of the theme and the objectivity of the self/other reference. Alvin was in a sense both therapist and client commenting upon himself, with himself, in himself, with the counsellor and himself. The actions were of a confused, obsessed and angry young person. Yet, in flow, the child shifts in motion stating the personalness of their relationship. The pivot became the shell of a rational exchange enhancing itself for exchanges of other kinds. This pivot can be represented figuratively in the following ways:

To date some of the themes presented in play therapy sessions have been identified. The number of pivots in a session is not relevant, however, the purpose each plays, the structure, and function each portends, are relevant. Using the pivot as the sine qua non of the dynamic makes the exchange mutual rather than hierarchical. The change process becomes instrumental and engaging in organization and function. The relations between the actions of therapy and the meanings they imply needs further examination. I refer

here to the (A/M) exchange (see Vygotsky 1979). When meaning determines the action where the consequences are thematic and sequential rather than simultaneous and momentary. The (A/M) relation was discussed more fully in the 1968, 1978, and 1983 papers. Constructive play themes are episodic and extended via powers held from within. They are free, spontaneous, novel, rhythmic, tense, variable and contadictory. These themes can function as a struggle for something as a representative of something and as a meaning unto themselves, and as a bridge to something beyond (see Mos, 1982).

The pivots of play therapy are different from those in everyday life. Work and play are not two ends of the same continuum. Both have their own antithesis telos and negation (see Schwartman 1977). Laughter in play therapy has a freshness where selfhood is found. The pivot belongs to the child, stimulated by him as a representation of his needs for meaning. Differences do not lie so much in the form as on the spontaneity of their being. The pivot is the antithesis of the objective undertaken. Playfully, it might be wise to leave this discussion with a secret. Play is far too precious to be taken seriously. We live in a time that is antagonistic to both friendship and play with a science that rejects the past as error, masters the present by sheer force of number, and engages in a futurology that knows no play in fidelity or possibility (Mos, 1983). The study of the relations between pivots and the meaning determining actions which are both playful and true becomes a cultural universe for further study and play. Using these as the subjective objective of method frees us from prescribing outcomes and their consequences and from becoming totally projective in purpose and technique. We all have reasons, which the reason knows not, of play as a function of the pivot and the pivot as a function of play therapy; they beg to be studied and studied. Play lives in the poetry of its meaning.

– Toot, Toot, Aree, Toot –

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